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MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief, ICAPS
Asst. Director for Collection and Dissemination
Asst. Director for Reports and Estimates ✓
Asst. Director for Special Operations

SUBJECT: Transliteration and Standardization of Spelling of Foreign Personal Names

1. The current lack of uniformity in the transliteration of the names of individuals from certain foreign languages into English leads to serious inaccuracies in the collection and evaluation of intelligence information. The problem is particularly acute in regard to the rendition into English of personal names from the Slavic, Far Eastern, Near Eastern, and other languages, which have different systems of characters, scripts, alphabets etc. Standardization of transliteration and spelling of such foreign place names is being established by the U. S. Board of Geographic Names, but no comparable governmental unit exists for personal names.

2. It is obvious that accurate biographic intelligence depends upon the identification of individuals with their correct names, the filing of all information on one individual under one name, and the standardization of names for the use of reporting and collecting agencies. The attached memorandum from the Chief, Biographic Information Division, Department of State to the Chief, Foreign Broadcast Information Branch, CIA, is a representative example of the difficulties which arise almost daily in this connection.

3. The primary concern of biographic intelligence units with the standardization of personal names is recognized. It is, however, of vital interest to translating agencies, such as Foreign Documents Branch, where it constitutes a major operating problem for both linguists and editors. The dominant interest of Foreign Broadcast Information Branch, which is not only one of the chief sources of biographic information, but also has the additional problem of rendering foreign names from their phonetic equivalents (as heard over the air) is indicated by the attached. Each of the above branches has organized reference systems for intra-branch use, which work closely with other biographic information units, but they are inadequate to deal with the situation.

4. In view of this lack of uniformity which occurs even within CIA, in the publications and reports of various offices and branches, it is suggested that a committee be formed to consider the problem from the

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point of view of this agency. The interest of other IAC members in the general subject and in eventual proposals for the establishment of an inter-agency board or some other method of improving the situation is clearly apparent. The problem is nevertheless so complex and has so many technical and specialized aspects that it is thought preferable to confine the preliminary discussion to the working level within CIA.

5. Request your comment and, if this proposal is considered favorably, the nomination of representatives from the appropriate branches of your office to serve on such a committee.

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[REDACTED]
GEORGE C. GANNON
Assistant Director for Operations

Email:
Memo

cc: OO - 2
ICAPS - 1
OCD - 1
ORE - 1✓
OSO - 1
FDB - 1
FBIB - 1